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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 2298
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 002779

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR X0XX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Mideast

[1](#)2. Iran

Key stories in the media:

Today's newspapers continue to closely follow the latest developments in the talks on the prisoner exchange deal for the release of Gilad Shalit. Israel is said to have conveyed its latest

offer to Hamas through the German mediator and is now awaiting Hamas's response. Reports in both Haaretz and Maariv say that Israel is demanding that at least 100 prisoners (Maariv cites 120, while Haaretz puts the figure at 100-130) of those slated for release not be freed to the West Bank, but rather be expelled to the Gaza Strip or sent abroad. The current assessments are that it will take at least until the end of December or mid-January to finalize the deal. Hamas sources said that their organization had given all it was capable of giving and would make no further concessions. A report in Fox News said that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu did not want the Shalit deal to be carried out and was raising various demands so that the rejection of the deal would come from Hamas. The Prime Minister's Bureau denied this report, saying that there was a sincere desire to reach a responsible deal that will guarantee the security of Israel's citizens and prevent Israelis from being murdered.

Makor Rishon-Hatsofe and other media quoted PM Ehud Barak as saying yesterday at a meeting with students in Rishon LeZion that the U.S. must prepare for a military option vis-a-vis Iran.

Leading media quoted Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas as saying in an interview with The Wall Street Journal that he would not let a third Intifada break out.

Leading media quoted Egyptian FM Ahmed Abu al-Gheit as saying that his country's building of a barrier along the border with Gaza is meant to defend against threats to national security.

Media quoted FM Avigdor Lieberman as saying yesterday, during a congress in the Knesset, that Israeli Arabs are striving to achieve an autonomous status. Israeli Arab Knesset members called him a racist.

Yediot and Maariv report this morning that Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak have been engaged in talks over the past few days aimed at effecting a split in Kadima, in conjunction with the intensive discussions in the forum of seven ministers on the Shalit deal. The idea appears to be to persuade at least seven Kadima MKs to break off from their party, in order to bolster the governing coalition. The potential defectors, including such figures as Shai Hermesh, Ronit Tirosh and Israel Hasson, were reportedly offered positions as ministers and deputy ministers. Kadima sources criticized the prime minister for dealing with political affairs at such a sensitive time and called his actions shameful.

Maariv reported that yesterday a Haifa square was named after the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Egyptian Ambassador to Israel Yasser Reda and Haifa Mayor Yona Yahav attended the ceremony.

The Jerusalem Post quoted 16 British NGOs as saying that the E.U. should publicly confirm a freeze in upgraded relations with Israel.

Maariv quoted Bank of Israel Governor Stanley Fischer as saying in an interview with The Economist that peace is the key to swift growth.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi Yona Metzger saying yesterday that Pope Benedict XVI's decision to proceed with the beatification of Pius XII would make it difficult to continue with Catholic-Jewish interfaith dialogue. Nevertheless, Metzger made it clear the Chief Rabbinate would not cut off relations with the Vatican.

Israel Hayom published the findings of a poll conducted between December 9 and 15 by the Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah:

- Fifty-two (52%) percent of the Israeli public are willing to pay any price for the return of prisoners;
- On the other hand, thirty-five (35%) percent believe that terrorists who perpetrated attacks in which Israelis were killed should not be released because this might encourage more kidnappings and terror attacks;
- Fifty-eight (58%) percent support the release of Arab citizens of Israel who engaged in terrorist activity in exchange for Gilad Shalit, while 36% are opposed.

- Regarding the decision of PM Netanyahu to freeze construction in the West Bank for ten months, forty-nine (49%) percent of Israelis are in favor, while forty-two (42%) percent are opposed to the measure.

1. Mideast:

Block Quotes:

I. QThe Paradox of Captivity

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning HaQaretz (12/23): QWhat is more important for Israel's security? Bombing a nuclear reactor or bringing home a single soldier being held prisoner? Going to war or the future address of Palestinian prisoners released in exchange for a prisoner? Setting the borders of the state or the imprisonment of senior terrorists? The theoretical answer is clear: Decisions about war and peace are more important than the exchange of prisoners. But in reality the attitude is precisely the opposite. It is much easier for a prime minister to divide Jerusalem or destroy Beirut than agree to the release of 10 serious Palestinian terrorists to the West Bank in exchange for the return of Gilad Shalit from Gaza.... The negotiations moved quickly so long as they were about numbers and stalled when they moved on to names. The politicians yearn to establish principles for such exchange deals in order to free themselves from personal dilemmas and move the discussion back from names and faces to more abstract terms. This will not do them any good: Even after the current deal is completed and Gilad Shalit is back home this debate will repeat itself if another Israeli is taken prisoner. Then, too, public opinion and the prime minister will be occupied much more with [the prisonerQs] return than with the fundamental strategic issues.

II. QDanger: Popular Struggle

Far-left Palestinian affairs correspondent Amira Hass wrote in Ha'aretz (12/23): QThe popular struggle, even if it is limited, shows that the Palestinian public is learning from its past mistakes and from the use of arms and is offering alternatives that even senior officials in the Palestinian Authority have been forced to support - at least on the level of public statements.... The brutal repression of the first intifada and the suppression of the first unarmed demonstrations of the second intifada with live fire have proved to Palestinians that the Israelis do not listen. The repression left a vacuum that was filled by those who sanctified the use of arms. Is that what the security establishment and its political superiors are trying to achieve today, too, in order to relieve us of the burden of a popular uprising?

III. QLearn the Lessons Now

Giora Eiland, former Director of IsraelQs National Security Council, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (12/23): QAny negotiations on a prisoner exchange that are held in the future between Israel and its enemies can be expected to place Israel at a disadvantage.... [During Operation Cast Lead,] giving up the idea of a comprehensive deal was a severe mistake.... [Also,] as soon as you let the negotiators conduct negotiations without first establishing the principled positions in a cabinet resolution, this enables the negotiations to develop to the point of a detailed proposal and when you sit down to discuss it only two choices remain: either approve the only proposal that exists or create a crisis of confidence with the other side, with the mediator, with public opinion, and so forth. This phenomenon is relevant not only to negotiations on a prisoner exchange, but also to many diplomatic issues. If we remember how the Oslo Accords were approved, it seems as though the process was similar.

IV. QNo Shalit, but Staying in Power

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in Yediot Aharonot (12/23): QThere is nothing wrong with the attempt of the Netanyahu-Barak duo

to dismantle Kadima. In the hunting grounds of politics, eating your rival's flesh is part of the game. We could even accept, albeit grudgingly, such an effort made in the midst of the discussions on the Shalit deal. Netanyahu and Barak are talented individuals. They are capable of handling two kinds of deals at the same time. It is more difficult to accept the pose. [Netanyahu] is not agonizing at all. While the entire country was vigilantly following the discussions of the forum of seven in Jerusalem, Netanyahu and Barak were courting defectors in the back benches of the opposition. Surprisingly enough, it becomes apparent that they are no less interested in staying in power as they are in Shalit. The obtuseness is infuriating, but more annoying is the hypocrisy.... Some say that the move succeeded and the Knesset members will already leave Kadima this week. Others say that it failed. Some say that we will have to wait for a few weeks in order to witness this cosmic event. On paper, this move will extend the government's lifespan.

¶2. Iran:

Block Quotes:

QA Gesture for Montazeri

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (12/23):
Let's not fool ourselves; the Iranian opposition is not Western-oriented and certainly not agnostic on Israel. Still, it is significant that former presidential hopefuls Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, along with former presidents Mohammad Khatami and Hashemi Rafsanjani, have all latched onto [the late Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali] Montazeri as a symbol.... Unfortunately, for those of us who'd like to see regime change, the opposition is not yet a cohesive movement and has no concrete strategy. Its limited goals are to overturn the rigged elections and increase freedom of expression. Meanwhile, Western leaders are arriving, glacially, at the realization that Iran's duplicitous determination to manufacture nuclear weapons -- and perfect the means to deliver them -- is not going to be reversed by diplomacy. The Chinese and Russians are likely to enfeeble any effort at a robust sanctions regime; Germany and Italy will find it hard to reduce their dependency on Iranian lucre. But there is something that's doable right now and doesn't require financial sacrifice or very much diplomatic daring: to signal support for the Iranian opposition, countries which value liberty should opt to indefinitely extend the vacations of their ambassadors now on home leave for the Christmas and New Year holidays. Is that too much to ask in honor of Montazeri's memory?

CUNNINGHAM